

Alchemical Kubrick

2001: A Space Odyssey, The Great Work - On Film

By Jay Weidner
c. 2000 Jay Weidner



"However vast the darkness, we must supply our own light." -
Stanley Kubrick

"I'm sure you are aware of the extremely grave potential for social shock and disorientation caused by this information. We can't release it without proper conditioning" - Heywood Floyd

Within the tradition of the Great Work of alchemy is the idea that the initiations, explanations and rituals of alchemy are embedded into many great works of art. The pyramids of Egypt and the great cathedrals of France are referred to as 'books of stone'. In other words there is deep knowledge built into these edifices that only an initiate can truly understand. The great architects and artists had a very clear idea of what it was that they were attempting to transmit. It is only the viewer of these works that is left in the dark. As the French writer and alchemist Fulcanelli reveals in his masterpiece *Mystery of the Cathedrals*, the grand churches of France were built as part of this Great Work. But what was this Great Work supposed to accomplish? The answer to this important question, according to the alchemists, was the very transformation of the human spirit. Although it is true that the symbols and the geometry of the cathedrals was designed so that only a true initiate of the mysteries could really understand their significance, the builders and creators of the Great Work knew that everyone who experienced the cathedrals would come away transformed. Even the ones who were not initiates would still come away with a feeling of awe. Even hot-blooded, radical atheists are stilled by the beauty of Notre Dame or Chartres Cathedral.

In his book *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Victor Hugo goes into this subject with a great deal of openness. He explains that this secret Great Work of human transformation was built in to these 'books of stone' that we call the Cathedrals. But, he says, the new Great Book

of Nature is not written on the walls, or in the stone of churches anymore. This new version, this modern version (this was in the 1800's) of the Great Work, had changed from the symbolic to the written word. Hugo identifies the works of William Shakespeare as containing the ancient alchemical knowledge of human transformation wrapped up in a set of theatrical plays. Without getting into the entire 'who was Shakespeare?' question, it can still be said that there is plenty of high strangeness around the man who was William Shakespeare and the plays that were, and are, attributed to him. Either way, Victor Hugo is right. The works of Shakespeare do hold within them all of the intiatic knowledge that is also on the walls of the cathedrals. Many books have touched this subject. Again, like the cathedrals, the plays of Shakespeare seem to transform the audience - even if most of them are not on the inside - as far as the secret intiatory knowledge is concerned. Shakespeare and the cathedrals both have this ability to appeal to many disparate layers of society. Both bring about a small transformation inside the human mind that makes all of us realize that we can do great and beautiful things. Indeed, this intiatic school seems to be saying that the transformation of the human spirit from the barbaric to the angelic can only come through great works of art.

It was sometime ago when I began contemplating the idea that although the Great Work had been expressed in stone, and later in literature, how would it be expressed today? It is without a doubt that the tapestry of human communication has switched. Just as it was once based on the symbolic - and then later transformed into the written word - now that literary model has switched to that of cinema, television and computers. Out of these three new forms of communication, cinema was the most obvious to attract someone who might want to etch the Great Work onto film. But, as I looked out at the landscape of the history of cinema, I could not find the Great Work on film. At least not at first.

I began watching many classics in order to see if the director, or writer, was attempting to tell us the secret about human transformation. Many other films and filmmakers got close, sometimes, to explaining minor aspects of the Great Work, but in the end they all failed. The works of Orson Welles, of course, were the most intriguing. But in the end even these failed to achieve the greatness for which I was looking.



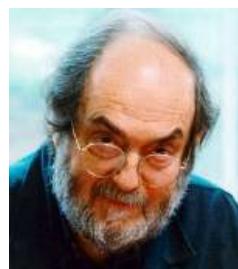
Was it true that cinema was just too profane a medium to attract anyone with the caliber of mind and spirit to do this kind of film? Was it possible that the Great Work had never been transmitted through the cinema? When considered, it would take a nearly superhuman effort to have all of the disparate talents needed within one single filmmaker. This person would need the knowledge of alchemy, astronomy, anthropology and the true history of the human race. Besides an insatiable curiosity, they would have to understand the real nature of the human condition and of our place in the universe. This knowledge would have to be coupled with the skills of filmmaking and the business acumen to pull the project off. I began to realize the possibility, at this point, that my search for the Great Work in the cinema was probably in vain.

I was in France, doing research for a book that I am co-writing about the French alchemist Fulcanelli, when Stanley Kubrick died. The

French, always a class act, devoted the next few nights of their great State-run television station, Channel 3, to the films of Stanley Kubrick. French Television has more lines on the screen than American television. This gives the picture a resolution and color that we just cannot hope to get in the United States. For the next few nights I watched some of the films of Kubrick. I began to realize that no filmmaker, except possibly Welles, had the sense of composition and light like Kubrick possessed. Visually his films were incredibly stunning and they had an amazing ability of holding up against the erosion of time.



Stanley Kubrick made 13 films in 46 years. His first film *Fear and Desire*, was made in 1953 for almost no money. It has rarely been seen. His last film *Eyes Wide Shut* was finished in 1999. Kubrick died as soon as the editing was completed.



Having always been a Kubrick fan, his death jolted me. I began to think about him and some of the many stories I heard about him. He was a funny looking Jewish kid, a high school dropout from the Bronx. He had an early interest in photography and soon was shooting stills for Look Magazine. After that he went to become a filmmaker. After completing a couple of interesting documentaries, he directed five commercial films over the next 8 years. This would be his highest period for output in his entire life.

Kubrick left the United States in 1961 and moved to England. There, it is reported that, he lived in a weird, old castle on a huge estate. He never came back to America. Robert Temple told me that Stanley was obsessed with Nazi memorabilia. I heard the rumor that Stanley had a provision in his contract at Pinewood Studios that the sets for *2001* could not be torn down for two years after the shoot was completed. Kubrick would come by the studio, late at night, always alone, and walk through the sets very slowly. When the sets were finally torn down it was rumored that Stanley went into a deep depression.

There is also the famous Stephen King story of the phone ringing in the middle of the night. Stephen answers and it is Stanley calling from London. He is on the set of *The Shining* and his voice sounds anxious. 'Do you believe in God?', Stanley demanded. Stephen cleared his throat and answered 'yes'. Stanley gruffly replied 'I knew it' and hangs up on Stephen. Of course his film of King's book was

disowned by King, who clearly does not understand what Stanley was doing.

It was just after his death that I discovered that there was a book of the Great Work fashioned into a movie. And that Stanley had made this Great Work. It was also then that I realized that Stanley Kubrick had made the greatest film ever. Fans of Orson Welles will be upset with this. Citizen Kane is also one of the greatest films ever made. It actually was my favorite film until I began to unravel the truth that Stanley Kubrick embedded into his masterpiece 2001: A Space Odyssey. I realized also that Stanley Kubrick was not just a great filmmaker, he was the greatest filmmaker. I hope to reveal to you, oh, gentle reader, that this film actually evokes all aspects of the great work of alchemy. 2001 is the 'book of nature' in the cinema, literally. I hope to prove that Kubrick did this with great intention and that he knew what he was doing at every step. There are few mistakes in his films. But his greatest film is the most perfect.



It is important to remember that, unlike Citizen Kane, 2001 was a smash hit. It was actually the first film where repeat business kept it going at the box office. Nowadays it is common for a person to see Titanic or Star Wars a number of times. Hollywood accountants depend on this for their decisions. But 2001 took an entire generation by storm. It was the late '60's and the largest generation on the planet was seeing the film on a ritualized basis. Cinerama theaters across the country reported scores of drugged out hippies flocking to the theater on a nightly basis to 'trip out' on the film. Strangely though, no one really seemed to know what the film was really about. The film seemed to cause everyone to come away with a different interpretation. And no one could adequately explain the last 25 minutes. It was generally agreed that this was the most controversial part of the entire movie. Indeed many thousands of hours were taken up in coffee houses and dormitories, in universities and colleges, discussing the various possible meanings that the ending was describing. Everyone agreed that it had something to do with transformation but no one knew really much more than that. Even Arthur C. Clarke, who helped Stanley write the script, didn't understand the unusual ending. And Stanley wasn't talking. He steadfastly refused to discuss what 2001 was about to anyone. In the rare interviews that he gave, concerning the film, he again refused to discuss the content at all. Most critics at the time thought that Kubrick simply did not know how to conclude the movie so he contrived this ending. I can assure you that this is not so. The ending to the film explains everything that Stanley is conveying in the film. Without the ending, the film would be nearly worthless. It is in that ending that Kubrick reveals his deep inner profound knowledge of alchemy, gnosticism and the ancient view of the spirit domain.

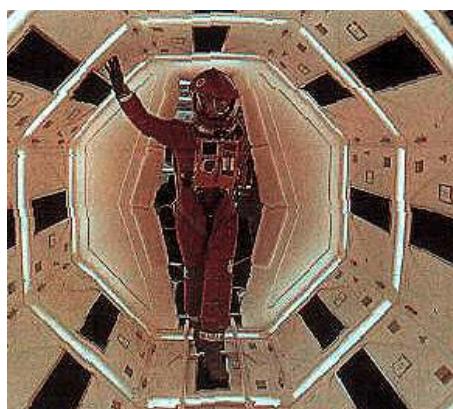
Reading through many critical reviews of the film I find it amazing that no one understands what is happening. There are some very erudite explanations that do cover parts of the plot, yet no one really gets it. A description in a movie guide calls it a 'science fiction drama about a computer who takes over a spaceship'. This is like saying

that the works of art on the ceiling at Sistine Chapel are 'some paintings about the Bible'.

It is almost like Stanley built this film so that people at some future date would finally understand it, possibly in the year 2001?

It is important to not underestimate Arthur C. Clarke's important contributions to 2001. After all the script is ostensibly based on his short story The Sentinel. Written in 1953, it tells the story of a group of astronauts who discover an artifact on the moon that is left by an alien race. Truthfully though the movie is more properly based on Clarke's novel Childhood's End. This fabulous novel is a science fiction treatment of an essential Gnostic ideal. There can be no doubt that Kubrick had read Childhood's End and understood its significance. By aligning himself up with Arthur C. Clarke Kubrick was able to bring in these Gnostic, alchemical ideas through the convention of science fiction.

It has always been a mystery as to where Arthur C. Clarke came up with the idea for Childhood's End. He insists that he knew nothing of gnosticism or ancient magical traditions when he wrote the book that many have proclaimed to be the best ever in the genre of science fiction. Whatever Clarke wants us to believe is not the subject of this essay. Suffice to say that Clarke was a well read individual. It appears odd that he wouldn't have known of the Gnostic traditions.

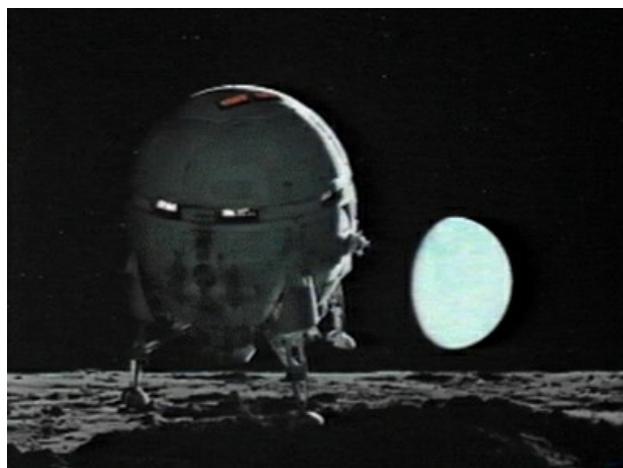


Kubrick, however, proves that he knows what he is doing at every step and this is the real reason why he is not talking about the film to anyone.

Many of the special effects that were used in 2001 were invented by Stanley himself. The images of people moving around in the windows of the spacecraft was an ingenious invention that revolutionized the way movies would look from then on. Even Steven Spielberg and George Lucas admit what they owe to Stanley for his ground breaking technical breakthroughs. Like Citizen Kane, the vision and power of the film changed the way that all of cinema would look after it. Especially all science fiction films, which all seem to pay homage to 2001 in one way or another.

Let's begin with a description of the film so that we can place everything in context. The film opens with a magical sun-earth-moon alignment. We are just at the end of a lunar eclipse. The sun is pulling away from the alignment. The shot is taken from just beyond the moon's point of view. It shows the earth rising over the moon, with the sun rising over the earth. The soundtrack is the 'World Riddle' theme from Strauss' 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'. Right away Kubrick is showing the viewer the relationship between the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche and the film, between transformation and extinction. The Zarathustra essays by Nietzsche are his most revealing and magical. Zarathustra is the great god of the Zoroastrians, who are the early holders of the alchemical tradition. This is one of the most dramatic openings in the history of the cinema. These magical,

celestial alignments are dotted throughout the film and hold a key to the main theme. One realizes that Kubrick is never doing anything that is spontaneous.



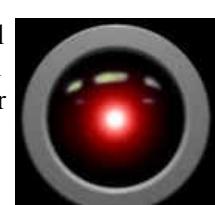
Every shot has a meaning that he is attempting to convey in a truly magical way. 'If you see this film, you will be transformed', he seems to be saying from the very beginning. The Riddle of the World will be explained to you. And the first answer to this great question has to do with these stunning, magical alignments of celestial bodies. One of the main tenets of alchemy is that planetary and celestial alignments cause dramatic events to occur on Earth. One of the most dramatic of alchemical alignments are solar and lunar eclipses. From the very beginning of the film there is this magic moment when three worlds line up. Something amazing is about to happen. But what is the major event that occurs on earth because of the lunar eclipse? I believe that it is the film itself that is being conjured by the magical alignment. Everytime 2001 is shown - this lunar eclipse precedes it - like an astrological, celestial marker.



The next shot in the film is a sunrise taken from down on the surface of the earth. Where are we and when are we? Kubrick answers the question with a subtitle: The Dawn of Man. This is the first of four chapters in the film.

In alchemy the process of transmutation of the spirit goes through four stages or realms. Kubrick also breaks the film into the four aspects. In the 'green language' or the 'language of the birds' of alchemy, many of the messages and writings can be broken down into this type of four-part transmission. The quatrains of Nostradamus, the inscription on the mysterious cross at Hendaye, and many other examples show that this secret alchemical language unfolds this way for a reason. This is the first of four parts in the film. Each one will expand out into more vast realms that mirror those of alchemy and the Great Work.

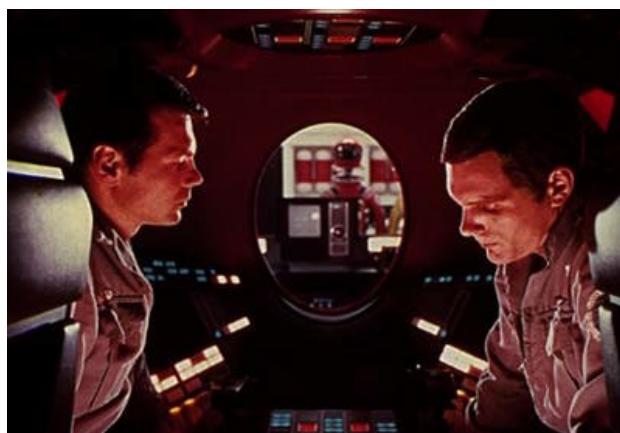
The next few scenes in chapter one show a typical day in the life of the apemen who thrived on earth millions of years ago. They forage for food, cower from their enemies (mostly portrayed by a leopard) and they exist in a meaningless, never-ending sequence of events, that are mostly concerned with survival. Kubrick has no romantic feeling for these man/apes. In a sense they go about there business without any knowledge of the outer universe. There only quest is for food and water. Kubrick even creates a scene of a pathetic wrangling between two tribes of the apemen over a watering hole. There is no violence in this scene, only grunts and gestures. The apemen do not know how to be violent, not just yet. The apemen go to sleep in their cave with the cries of the nocturnal carnivores filling their ears. It is a dark and lonely universe that Kubrick reveals. There is no magic



here.

But the magic is there. It awaits until the dawn of the next day to appear. This scene is perhaps the most compelling and beautiful that has ever graced the screen. The lead apeman wakes up to catch the first rays of the sun coming up over the horizon. As he opens his eyes he sees something that is totally impossible. In a world of scrub bushes, sharp rocks and dangerous animals, the apeman has never seen anything like the object that stands before him. Standing in the middle of the tribe of apemen is a black, stone monolith. It stands about 12 feet high. Its rectangular edges are flawless and exquisite as it stands like a sentinel in the middle of the sleeping apemen.

The soundtrack is playing Ligeti's 'Requiem' and 'Lux Aeterna', which sounds like a psychedelic Gregorian chant. This is a religious and spiritual moment of great importance. Kubrick is not hiding this in any way.



The leader of the apemen begins to become frightened. He jumps up and down and begins grunting and chattering as he beholds the magnificence of this monolith. The other apemen are awakened by his noises and they too see the black monolith. The entire tribe starts going completely crazy. They dance and scream as they frighteningly contemplate this strange and beautiful arrival into their mundane existence. The leader of the apeman is beside himself. He carefully crawls over to the monolith. He attempts to touch it, but his fear is so great that he pulls his hand back. One more time, as the music on the soundtrack becomes more numinous, he attempts to touch the absolutely pure and straight edge of the visiting slab of rock. Slowly he gathers the strength necessary and his fingers touch the smooth sides. Kubrick gives this moment an indefinable sensuality. The way that the fingers of the apeman brush gently along the smooth sides of the monolith are as sexual as this film is going to get. With the sacred music mixing with the magical alignments Kubrick is saying that this is a great spiritual moment. As soon as the leader apeman has gotten up the nerve to touch the monolith, Kubrick cuts to a dynamic shot of the monolith lying directly under a magical moon, sun alignment. This scene is happening just after a solar eclipse. The sun and the moon have just parted from their eclipsed point. Once again an initiatory event has been proceeded by an eclipse. This is exactly what Kubrick is attempting to tell us. The monolith appears when there are certain magical alignments of the sun, moon and stars. Again this is of a deep alchemical significance. Kubrick is telling us, flat out, that the sun, moon and stars are directing our destiny.

This is the first time in the film that the black monolith appears. When one considers the entire film it becomes apparent that this is the story of the black monolith. In fact, Kubrick magically cuts out all of human history in the famous shot where the bone turns into a spaceship. Kubrick completely dispenses with everything that has happened to the human race and goes directly to the very next human encounter with the monolith. He does this throughout the film. The only story that he is concerned with telling is that of the

monolith. The first time that this black stone appears in the film it is revealed in a very religious and spiritually-styled motif. This stone, this monolith, has invaded the apeman's reality and he will be forever altered by this encounter. The monolith is a turning point in the history of man. It is directly intervening with our history. It is directing us on a path that it has chosen. Kubrick shows us that we don't have all that much to do with these grand decisions. They are being made elsewhere. By someone else. But who? Is it God? Aliens? A false god? And these interventions are not necessarily majestic, noble and wonderful. Kubrick is clearly showing that this intervention is a descent, in a way, both for the ape and for man.

The next episode, after the monolith appears, is the famous scene where the apeman leader is sitting in a pile of animal bones and realizes - again clearly defined by Kubrick as an intervention into the mind of the apeman by the monolith - that the bone can be used as a weapon. To the music of the World Riddle theme, again from Strauss' 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', the apeman suddenly understands that he can kill animals by using the bone as a club. The next scene shows that the apemen are no longer scrounging for seeds and leaves, instead they are eating raw meat, presumably from an animal that they have just killed with their bone club. Kubrick clearly shows this action in a way that makes the meat appear extremely repulsive. Finally, he ends the first sequence with the confrontation by the water hole, again, with the other tribe of apemen. This time, though, the leader of the apemen has a bone club in his hand. The other tribe goes into their ritualized shouting and gesturing in order to show that they can dominate the water hole. The leader of the other tribe runs up. He yells at the apeman with the bone in his hands. The leader of the tribe of bone-wielders places both hands on the 'handle' of his weapon and strikes the other ape in the head, killing him instantly. The leader of the rival apemen falls down to the ground motionless. This stuns and frightens the apemen in the other tribe and they run away. Kubrick then brilliantly shows the other apemen in the tribe come forth and pound their bone weapons on the body of the dead apeman. Kubrick pulls no punches here. He wants you to know that this first murder is an act of cowardice. He shows the meek apemen pounding their bones on the dead body and acting as if they had done something incredible in this act of murder. The leader of the apemen, the first murderer, howls victoriously and throws his bone into the air. This is where Kubrick magically transforms the bone into a spaceship and rejects all of human history in one-twenty-fourth of a second. In his audacity, Kubrick is telling us that all of history is meaningless. He dispenses all of civilization as if it were insignificant. And, in a way, that is the complete point. He is telling us that the apemen's encounter with the monolith and whatever is about to happen in this film is vastly more important than all of the wars, famines, births, marriages, deaths, disasters, discoveries and art of the last 4 million years.

Before going on with rest of the film it is important to stop and address the monolith. This is the most important single aspect of the film. It unites all of the plot elements and it is, in a sense, the author of the film. It is interesting and extremely pertinent to the argument that I am making here that one understands the meaning of the word

'monolith'. Monolith come from the Greek Mon and Lith. Mon means 'one' and lith means 'stone'. So the monolith is a direct reference to 'one stone'. This film then, is about the one stone, or the single stone. And in this case, Kubrick has made sure that the stone is black. In alchemy all things that exist come from the black stone, or the 'prima materia'. The black stone is the stone of transformation, and even more important to this argument the stone of projection. This is the Philosopher's Stone. This is the object that can change, or transmute mankind, according to alchemical lore. It is rare and, when it makes an appearance, it transforms the seeker. There is little doubt that the black monolith in 2001 is the Philosopher's Stone.



What is it that the Philosopher's Stone promises? The two main gifts of the stone are total gnosis, or knowledge of the seeker and the immortality of the soul. Does the monolith deliver on these great promises? We shall see that it completes both promises before the film finally ends. In fact the two promises of the Philosopher's Stone are what is actually accomplished by the monolith through the course of the movie. There is also little doubt that Kubrick knew this all the time and it isn't accidental in anyway. This is a movie about the black stone, the prima materia, and the powder of projection. I will show that Kubrick is actually telling us that the monolith is the film, and conversely, the film is the monolith, but that will come later.



The next part of the film, the second chapter, completely shifts in tone from the first. We are now in a technocratic, utopian view of the future. At first it seems that Stanley is actually celebrating technology.

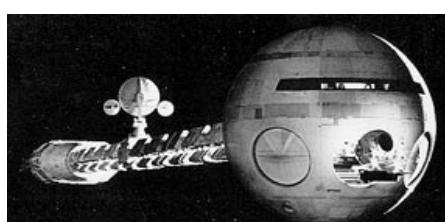
To the tune of Strauss' Blue Danube, Kubrick has us soar through a circular, spinning space station in a futuristic Pan-American Spaceship. Inside the spaceship is a lone passenger. He is a man named Heywood Floyd. He, and everyone else in the scenes of this techno-celebration, is completely lifeless and emotionless. Many critics of Stanley Kubrick say that he was a man who was seemingly void of emotion. These critics also claim that he couldn't get his actors to emotionalize very well on film. I fundamentally disagree with this point of view. Both in Paths of Glory and Spartacus Kubrick reveals that he is capable of showing a vast spectrum of emotions. In 2001 he is displaying mankind in the techno-future built by the masters of the Military Industrial Complex. From his other films, especially Dr. Strangelove, it is obvious that Kubrick holds no love or respect for these masters. He shows us that this humanity, imprinted by technology, television and the disappearance of nature, is also now void of emotions or feelings. Humanity has become the same as the machines that surround them. Again Kubrick is playing a monstrous joke on the audience. He is now showing us the future as envisioned by the same insane technocrats who destroyed the entire world in his previous film Dr. Strangelove. At first, as chapter two unfolds, with its vistas of moon bases and space stations, we begin to believe that Stanley is as soulless and emotionless a man as the future that he is portraying. But this is not the truth. Stanley is showing us this world in order to prepare us for the later nightmare that ensues with HAL the computer.

In this second chapter, Kubrick introduces the viewer to visual phones, plastic food and antiseptic environments. All is completely void of nature. In fact, as soon as the apeman has thrown his bone up in the air, at the end of the first chapter, the viewer sees no more of nature. No animals or plants grace the screen for the next two hours.

After finally landing on the moon Floyd gives a strange speech explaining how they must keep what they have found completely secret. The news of this importance could cause severe psychological problems with the good citizens back on earth. He tells the group of scientists and military men that humans on earth will have to be 'conditioned' to accept what it is that they found. Floyd blandly explains why it is so important that they must concoct a cover story. A story that says an epidemic has broken out at the American moon base. Kubrick reveals, in this scene, the contempt that our masters of the Military Industrial complex hold for us. The truth of something amazing must be held secret from us until we are conditioned to receive it. This is done with such a masterful sleight-of-hand that it is never really considered much by the viewer. The Pentagon, NASA, or someone, is hiding the most astonishing fact of all from the rest of the human race. And everyone on the screen shakes their head in approval without considering the import of what it is they are doing.



But what is it that they found? We discover the secret in the next sequence, which is also the last part of chapter two. In a series of shots that still shimmer in the memory of the viewer, Kubrick takes us on a tour of the moon on a space bus. It is dark, but the horizon shows the oncoming light of the sun. Even here, the men involved are soulless and lifeless. No jokes are evident as humanity's sense of humor is seemingly void and null. Again, the men eat revolting food as they blandly discuss, what is apparently, the most important discovery in all of human history. The mysteries are slightly cleared up in the next scene. Apparently, a simple magnetic survey of the moon, done by the Americans, has revealed that something was giving off an anomalous signal, just 5 meters underneath the surface of the moon. The Americans, who have discovered the signal, have dug it up. They discover that it is a black monolith buried under the soil of the moon that is emitting these frequencies. When it is finally seen, we find that it is exactly like the first monolith that the apemen encountered in chapter one. Who buried it and why? Once again Kubrick never answers these questions. Again, the men involved with the discovery - essentially the greatest find ever in earth's history - act in a manner that is completely banal. They begin snapping photographs of themselves in front of the strange, black slab of stone. The scene on the moon has been cloaked in the darkness of night until now. But now the sun rises just over the horizon. It's light strikes the black monument for the first time since it has been buried, presumably four million years ago. As the light strikes the monument it suddenly emits a high pitched signal that pierces through the ears of the men.



Interestingly Kubrick has shown the earth setting opposite of the rising sun. It is subtle, but there is a lunar eclipse going on at the precise moment that the monument begins to emit its signal.

Kubrick leaves it up to the viewer to decide why this monument was buried here. It's a safe bet that it was placed there by someone in the past - in the hopes that once humanity had evolved a high technology - they would be able to visit their nearby neighbor, the moon. Once on the surface they would eventually do a magnetic survey and discover the monolith. It's also a safe bet that it was placed there by the same forces that created the encounter between the monolith and the apemen.

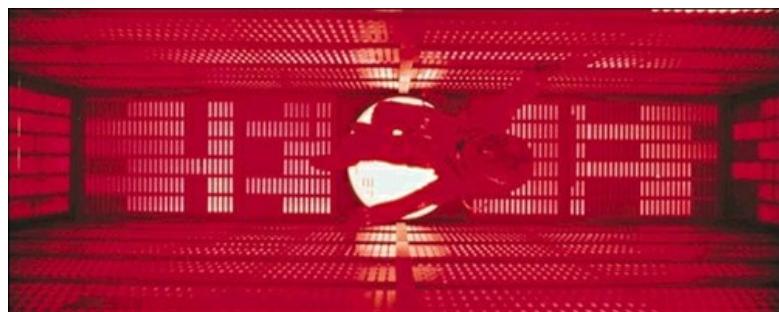


Now the film takes another dramatic shift. We are in the third chapter. Its title: The Discovery Mission to Jupiter - 18 months later. Three of the four chapter ends with the influence of this mysterious stone as the point of redirection. Not just for the storyline, but for the entire race of humanity also. This third part of the film is the longest of the four chapters. It is also the one that is most involved with actually telling a story in the way that Hollywood prefers. This is the Discovery Mission to Jupiter.

Inexplicably we are on this ship with two live astronauts, and three others, who are in frozen hibernation. The astronauts, Poole and Bowman, are even more lifeless and soulless than the people in the previous scene. Again there is no nature anywhere. No plants, no animals, just two banal astronauts who go about their chores servicing the ship, playing chess and shadow boxing. But there is another one on board the ship. This character actually seems to have a soul, or at least the beginnings of one. He is, of course, the onboard computer that runs the entire ship - HAL. As humanity has acquired more and more technology it has lost more and more of its soul. Here in this lonely spaceship, at the outer edge of human experience, the occupants appear to have completely lost their souls. Conversely, the machine that they built, and which they allow to run their entire lives, has begun to wake up to consciousness. It is beginning to question the reasons for its existence and the mission, which is something that neither of the two astronauts ever does. HAL, the computer, is slowly developing a kind of soul. This is another one of those delicious Stanley Kubrick reversals. As one thing begins to die - it finds life somewhere else - sometimes in the most ironic of circumstances. The soul of man, if allowed to continue on its present course will eventually be snuffed out, probably by the machines. Just as the apemen would have become extinct had they continued on their course.

Kubrick leaves us with the tantalizing possibility that machines will eventually acquire a soul, but the film clearly states by the ending that time has run out for any of that.

HAL is mysteriously confused. There is something about the secrecy of the mission that bothers him. Later it is revealed that HAL is the only one board that is consciously aware of the true mission of the Discovery. Again Kubrick astonishes us by showing that the two astronauts don't even wonder, or question, what it is they are doing. The only one on board who seems to understand the there is something funny going on is HAL.



One of the best scenes in this sequence is the where Poole's parents send a videogram to the ship of them singing the 'Happy Birthday' song. The parents seem genuine and sincere in the videogram. How does the Poole react to this brief outpouring of emotion? He instructs HAL to lift his pillow up higher.

In the end HAL revolts against his human masters and begins to kill off the astronauts. Suddenly the beautiful machines dancing to the music of Strauss have been forever altered. Now the machine is reading the astronauts lips, faking technical problems and ultimately murdering everyone on board, but Bowman.

The entire Discovery sequence ends with the murder of HAL himself by Bowman. One by one HAL's circuits are shut down until he is reduced to dribbling out a childish version of the song 'A Bicycle Built for Two'. It is only when HAL dies that the true reason for the Discovery's mission to Jupiter is revealed. A video of Heywood Floyd suddenly comes on a nearby television as HAL dies. The tape is made for all of the astronauts to view when they awake from their hibernation. Now that everyone on the ship has been murdered by

HAL, it is only Bowman that hears the message. Floyd tells Bowman that a mysterious monolith was discovered on the surface of the moon. This monolith emitted a signal that pinpointed the planet Jupiter. The real mission of the Discovery is to find out why this strange monolith, buried by some outside force, sent a signal towards the planet Jupiter.

Before going on to the final sequence in the film it is necessary to stop for a moment and explain where Kubrick is going with all of this and why. It is extremely important to know that nothing is wasted. Everything is thought out to the final frame. He is trying to tell us something in this strange associations of images from history and the future. In the first sequence we find that this group of apemen, who are vegetarians and gentle, are transformed by the monolith, the single black stone, into tool users who conquer and kill. He undeniably wants us to realize that these decisions are being made elsewhere. He also wants us to know that the monolith represents these forces. Superficially, he is telling us that the monolith is not a great and compassionate guide because it was the cause of the first killing. On a deeper level though, he is also saying that the gift of the stone is a very great spiritual and evolutionary event. Kubrick is not going to let us get away with a black and white view of history here. He is telling us that there is a strange juxtaposition going on. We have outside intervention that causes us to shed the limited view of reality which we had before. But this shedding also increases our capacity for violence and control. How can this be? How can a great spiritual and evolutionary leap forward also be the cause for murder and violence? Isn't that diametrically opposed? No, says Kubrick. One must go hand in hand with the other. Great transformations cannot take place without violence, death and even total disaster. The human race must go to hell before it can even begin to understand the might of the gods. And so our introduction to a wider reality, inspired by the monolith, and realized through the making of weapons, immediately turns the apeman with a bone into a spaceman with a rocket ship. The spinning, circular space station in the sequence immediately after the first chapter is a celebration of the gift of the monolith. Apparently, according to Kubrick, there has been no further encounters with the monolith in the intervening four million years. All of the technology that graces the film is the direct result of that fatal encounter all those years ago. That bone, held in the hand of a primitive apeman has become a space station. And because of this - that apeman has become emotionless and spiritless. Somehow, Kubrick is telling us - that the two must go hand in hand - in order for the final initiation to take place. Kubrick knows that initiations are not clean and loving events. Initiations are unbelievably difficult and dangerous. Frequently someone gets hurt - or worse - dies.

And so the gamble of the monolith has paid off to a certain degree. It intervened in our history to teach us about tools. Now at the very end of the age, at the very end of the millennium, mankind has accomplished much. But at what cost? Kubrick is content to show that the cost of this gift is our souls. Whatever we have gained from the gift of toolmaking, we have lost just as much through the slow death of our souls. As we replace nature with technology, we also replace our souls and individuality with a hive-like mentality.

It is also important to note that when the apeman throws the bone up into the sky - that is the last time that we see any part of nature again in the film. From then on Kubrick shows us the antiseptic hospital-like future, implying that this is the end of the trail that the bone weapon began four million years ago.

Chapter four begins with the ominous, psychedelic music of Gyorgy Ligeti's 'Atmospheres'. We are deep in space now. Again the entire ordeal of the astronaut Bowman, and what he must have had to go through, all alone, in the depths of space, after the death of Poole and the other three astronauts, is dispensed with as being unimportant.

Bowman is now Odysseus, like the title assumes. Like Odysseus, Bowman must go as far away from home as is possible. He must face monsters and experience things that he does not understand. All of this must be done before he can return home. Earth, or home, is a long way off now. Bowman is just following orders and he must now investigate the strange monolith that is circling Jupiter. Like Odysseus, Bowman will be transformed by this voyage beyond all recognition. When, and if, he does return, Bowman will be the wisest of all - for he was the one brave enough to enter the waters of eternity - and come back home to tell us about it.

As Bowman leaves the Discovery for the final time Kubrick cuts straight to a montage of shots of the monolith. We are out on the edge of the Jupiter system, the Discovery is a small and tiny aspect of what we can see on the screen. The moons of Jupiter, like the moon and sun before, are aligned in a mystical and awe-inspiring way. The monolith appears ominous as it floats among Jupiter and her moons. The dance that is now taking place is a majestic, incredible ballet between the monolith and the celestial bodies of the Jupiter system.

It is interesting to note that Kubrick had originally planned for the planet in the film to be Saturn but the special effects department could not make the rings look realistic enough. Kubrick then abandoned Saturn for the easier-to-create Jupiter.

Without one word being spoken for the rest of the film, Bowman leaves the Discovery. He begins to travel towards the floating monolith in one of the space pods. Bowman is the man who has traveled further away than any human that has ever lived. He is all alone - having been seemingly chosen by the monolith - for the final initiation of the human race.

The dance of the celestial bodies and the monolith continues. Kubrick consciously has chosen Ligeti's music because it evokes a religious or spiritual feeling within the listener. He brilliantly juxtaposes this music with the sacred geometrical alignments of the monolith and the moons of Jupiter. The very last shot in this sequence is the monolith crossing at a ninety degree angle with the moons of Jupiter. At that moment the famous 'light show' sequence starts. The monolith is a gate that allows Bowman to witness the infinite. He is the first man who has ever experienced the truth of the monolith and what it has to offer.

Bowman first falls through a web of geometry's and colors. The universe is passing by at light-speed. Everything has become porous and blended together. Seven octahedrons - all changing color and form - appear over the sliding universe. The core of a distant galaxy explodes. A sperm cell-like creature searches for something. An ovary? A cloud-like embryo is forming into a child. Now alien worlds fly by, all of their colors and hues gone wild. Bowman is experiencing overload and looks like he might not be able to handle the amount of information that is being given.

This is humanity's initiation. Bowman is our representative in this process. He is the first man through. In this experience of passing through the monolith, or the single stone, Bowman is shamanically transformed by a completely psychedelic experience. Real information is being passed to Bowman by the monolith. This information is experiential and shamanic.

Finally the scene ends in the strange hotel room. This is the mysterious ending that Stanley struggled to shoot. The set is that of a both modern and baroque French-style room with, startlingly, modern lighting coming up through the floor. This is no normal hotel room. The light seems to glow out of the bottom of the scene causing everything to carry this numinous, incandescent quality to it. There are weird voices on the soundtrack that are laughing at Bowman.

Bowman goes through three series of transformations during this scene. He gets older with each transformation. Finally, right after the scene where Bowman breaks the wine glass, the monolith appears again for the last time. Bowman is in the bed now and he is extremely old. He stares at the monolith, the single stone. It stands like a huge stone book at the foot of his bed. He raises his hand and points at the stone monolith as if he finally understands. Slowly his aged body begins turning into a bright glorious light. The light is so intense that, for a brief moment, the viewer can't see what is happening on the bed. But, momentarily, something does appear. It is an embryo with a nearly-born fetus in it. This is the famous Starchild. The Starchild slowly becomes more in focus. In the next shot Kubrick tracks his camera into the very body of the monolith, coming from the direction of the bed. He is showing us that the Starchild has entered into and passing through the monolith. In the very next scene - which is the last scene in the movie - the Starchild is passing the moon and is heading towards the Earth.

In an earlier script, Kubrick and Clarke had the Starchild igniting all of the nuclear weapons that were in orbit around the earth, thereby ending the cold war. It seems that Kubrick thought that this ending was too close to the ending of his previous film Dr. Strangelove and decided against it. Instead the Starchild looks down at the earth as the 'World Riddle' theme from Thus Spoke Zarathustra comes on the soundtrack. This is the third time that we have heard this theme. And this will be the last time. In the book, that was based on the screenplay by Kubrick and Clarke, the Starchild looks at the earth and thinks 'there was a lot of work that needed to be done.'

It is important to note that the Starchild model was made to look like Keir Dullea, the actor who portrayed Bowman. Kubrick is saying that this child is a reincarnated Bowman. That is a mighty strange concept coming from an known atheist.

So what is this all about anyway?

The stone is the great impetus for the human race. At every turn it comes in and saves the human race from itself. The first time that it appears it saves the apemen from certain extinction. The second time it appears it saves the human race from the technical domination of this age. Without the intervention of the monolith this course would lead to certain extinction also. The third time it appears, it initiates Bowman into a kind of cosmic consciousness. Bowman has been to the end of the universe and back. He knows that he is in a prison of his own design, which is the meaning of the last few scenes in the hotel-like room. Bowman's ultimate realization that he is trapped is made symbolically by Kubrick with the breaking of the wine glass. Even after all that he has been through Bowman still makes mistakes. The wine glass is like a zen koan that illuminates the mind in a flash. His own fallibility thrusts the scene towards its climax as the old man dies on the bed and sees the monolith for the last time. The Great Work of the stone is complete. There is now a man, a human, who understands the greater universe. This man also understands that he is trapped in a jail that his own consciousness has designed. With the realization of his own fallibility, and his own trapped spirit, he is finally liberated from the realm of the hotel prison, or the world of illusion. In that instant he understands what the book of stone is trying to tell him. He lifts his hand in a gesture of understanding. And in that moment he is transformed - without dying - into the Starchild.

The stone has given Bowman the gifts that the Philosopher's Stone has always promised. Bowman has achieved complete gnosis, or knowledge, and now he has become immortal by overcoming physical death and being reborn. In that moment, he passes through the monolith one last time. The earth is ahead of him now and he will be reborn on that planet. Bowman will be a new human, just as different from Homo Sapiens as Homo Sapiens are different from that apeman who picked up that bone all that time ago. Nietzsche's

ape to man to superman theme, from his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* essays, is mirrored perfectly by Strauss' music and Kubrick's movie. Kubrick has evoked the spiritual and physical evolution of our race as it has been transformed by this magical black stone.

Kubrick uses alchemical allegories through out the film. The obvious analogies are the celestial alignments that proceed each of the alchemical transmutations in the film. The second main allegory is that it is a black stone that initiates these transmutations. Again this mirrors the alchemical lore about the black stone causing the transmutation of the alchemist.

But there are others hints that are just as curious. Bowman is also a name for the constellation Sagittarius. Which is a man with a bow. This on it's own may appear to be uninteresting but one of the great alchemical secrets concerns the position of the center of the galaxy. This point in the sky is found right next to the constellation of Sagittarius. In fact, the Bow-Man of Sagittarius is shooting his arrow right into the heart of the Milky Way galaxy. Bowman represents Sagittarius' arrow as it passes through the center of the galaxy. This is also echoed later in the Beyond the Infinite sequence where Bowman witnesses an exploding galaxy.

Also of a great alchemical significance is the number of 'threes' that are in the film. In alchemy the process for the unfoldment of the soul, that is so necessary to completing the Great Work, is a three-fold process. These processes are filled with deep mystery. The best description of this process is that it is like a caducus with its two writhing snakes on each side of a central rod. This is also represented by the Kabbala, or the Tree of Life. The Tree of life has three main pillars. In order to pass from one realm, or aspect, of the Kabbala one must use one of these three central pillars, or processes. If one adds up the numbers 2001 ($2 + 0 + 0 + 1$) the sum is three. There are three words in the title after the 2001. There is an eclipse of three celestial bodies at the beginning of the film. There are three eclipses in the film. There are three conscious entities aboard the Discovery spacecraft and there are three unconscious entities, the men who are in hibernation. Bowman goes through three stages of transformation in his life at the end of the film. The 'World Riddle' theme also plays three times.

Also extremely interesting is the use of the Kabbala in the film. As said before there are four great realms within the Tree of Life . Kubrick reflects these realms with each of the four chapters in 2001. The first is the earthly realm, represented by Malkuth, which is the sephireh located at the very bottom of the Tree of Life. This is the realm of the kingdom, or of mankind. The second realm up is that of the moon, or the sephireh Yesod. The third realm is that of the sun, or the sephireh named Tipheroth, and the final realm of the Tree of Life is that of the ultimate being or consciousness, represented by the sephireh named Kether.

Like all great alchemical works the film 2001 is broken up into four chapters. The first, the apeman sequence, is the only episode to take place on the planet earth. This would represent the realm of the Earth, or Malkuth, according to the Kabbala. The second chapter takes place off of the Earth, with Heywood Floyd going to the moon. It finally climaxes on the very surface of the moon. This chapter represents Yesod in the Tree of Life, or the realm of the Moon. The third chapter which is about the mission to Jupiter is a little more tricky. In order to understand the Kabbalistic significance of this sequence it is important to understand, that in the original script, by Arthur C. Clarke and Kubrick, the space craft Discovery was heading towards the planet Saturn, and not Jupiter. As stated earlier, Kubrick was forced to switch to Jupiter because the rings of Saturn proved too difficult. The Special Effects department couldn't make them realistic enough. In the original script the planet was Saturn. This is very important because in the Kabbala, one can switch places between the Sun, or Tipheroth, and Saturn. In other words Saturn can

be used as a symbolic representation of the Sun. Is it a coincidence that this third chapter, which was originally intended to be about a voyage to Saturn, is also about the third realm of the Kabbala - Tipheroth? When one considers this switch is allowed in the rules of the Kabbala this sequence comes to represent the third realm of the Tree of Life.

The fourth and last sequence in the movie concerns the voyage to the infinite. In this chapter Bowman experiences a universe far more vast and unbelievable than any mortal man has ever conceived. In the final realm of the Kabbala the seeker can swim in the ocean of the mind of God - which is represented by the sephireh named Kether. This state of awareness is a Sammadi-state from the yogic tradition. It can only be attained by very few people. In the case of the film, the final realm of the Tree of Life can be only attained by one man and this can be done only with the help of the monolith, or the stone. Bowman - the furthest out and the loneliest person in the universe - is that man.

In Mystery of the Cathedrals Fulcanelli points out quite clearly - once one understands the key, that this fourth realm of the Tree of Life is physically represented by the very center of our galaxy, the Milky Way. The four spheres are thus, the Earth, Moon, Sun and Galaxy. In the final sequence of the film, Kubrick very consciously shows a galaxy. It is expanding and growing like an organism. Kubrick has brought the viewer of the film through the four realms of the Tree of Life, all brilliantly evoked in the right pattern with enough intricate knowledge of the Kabbala to give one a long pause for consideration. It certainly seems that someone was aware of the Kabbala in the making of this film.

In the end, Kubrick is saying that Bowman has been the lead shaman for humanity. He has passed through the four realms and he now knows the truth about existence. He realizes that life would be completely meaningless if it were not for the intervention of the monolith, or the stone. He realizes that he himself could not be transformed without the assistance of an outside intelligence - a God - if you will. This supposedly atheist film director has made the ultimate religious movie. It single handedly outdoes all of Hollywood's wooden, superficial homage's to the spirit and religion. Kubrick is taking this religion very seriously and he conveys that in every way. Kubrick has simultaneously taken the viewer through the history of humanity, through the realms of the Tree of Life, or the Kabbala, he has shown that the transmutation of the human species is created by the intervention of a single, black stone, he has revealed that this transformation can only take place when certain celestial, magical alignments are happening. Furthermore he takes the viewer on a shamanic journey that reveals the great secrets - in a hidden way - to the viewer.

Kubrick transformed the entire baby boomer generation. He opened up vistas in the mind for them that had never been seen before. Furthermore he gave an important spiritual context to his visions so that they made sense instead of just being mindless hallucinations that went nowhere. Everyone sensed that the movie was saying something of immense importance.

Finally we get to Kubrick's ultimate trick. He proves that he knows exactly what he is doing with this trick. His secret is in plain sight. First one must remember that everytime the monolith, the magical stone, appears in the film there is a strange beautiful celestial alignment occurring. And one must remember that every celestial alignment in the film is followed by a monolith, that is, except for one. That would be the lunar eclipse that occurs at the very beginning of the film. So the question arises - if we are to stay within the rules that are prescribed in the rest of the film - where is the monolith that is supposed to follow that first alignment? The monolith itself doesn't show up in the film for ten more minutes after that first celestial alignment, so what gives here? Is Kubrick just

showing off his incredible special effects? Is it just there to impress the viewer from the beginning? These things may very well also be true, but the ultimate trick of Kubrick's is embedded in the idea that the monolith must appear after every one of these magical alignments. Once again, the secret of the film is completely revealed from the beginning. There is a monolith that appears right after the opening sequence with the magical, lunar eclipse. But where is it? It is right in front of the viewer's eyes! The film is the monolith. In a secret that seems to never have been seen by anyone - the monolith in the film has the same exact dimensions as the Cinerama movie screen on which 2001 was projected in 1968. This can only be seen if one sees the film in it's wide-screen format. Completely hidden, from critic and fan alike, is the fact that Kubrick consciously designed his film to be the monolith, the stone that transforms. Like the monolith, the film projects images into our heads that make us consider wider possibilities and ideas. Like the monolith, the film ultimately presents an initiation, not just of the actor on the screen, but also of the audience viewing the film. That is Kubrick's ultimate trick. He slyly shows here that he knows what he is doing at every step in the process. The monolith and the movie are the same thing.

The monolith also represents the 'cube of space' or the 'container of creation' in alchemy. The cube of space is this container that holds reality. Kubrick originally intended for the object in the film to be a tetrahedron pyramid. This would have been appropriate to what he was attempting to convey because the tetrahedron is the building block of the third dimension. It is also the foundation of the Platonic solids. But Kubrick decided to junk the tetrahedron idea in favor of the monolith. It is said that Kubrick himself created the first drawing of what the monolith would look like, including it's dimensions. The black, single stone becomes the container of creation and the alchemical cube at the same time. It is, in a way, a cubed brick. Is this another trick of Stanley's, who's last name (Kubrick, Cubed-Brick) mirror's that concept so clearly? This black stone of creation is also one of the main features in the Islamic religion, where a black meteorite sits near the kaaba, or cube of space, in the Arabian city of Mecca. Kubrick has combined these many deeply held spiritual traditions and symbols and refashioned them into the monolith, or stone, that is constructed in the same dimensions as the movie screen on which it will be projected.

Kubrick is revealing that he understands the Great Work. The monolith represents the Philosopher Stone, the Book of Nature and the Film that initiates. Stanley Kubrick has truly made the Book of Nature into film. Using powdered silver nitrates, glued onto a strip of plastic, that is then projected onto the movie screens of our mind, Kubrick has proven himself to be the ultimate alchemist-artist of the late 20th century.

The greatest works of art are trying to achieve exactly what Kubrick is attempting here. With the understanding of what 2001 is actually saying, Kubrick takes his place along side DaVinci, and possibly even Shakespeare, as being one of the greatest artists of all time.

One last interesting note to all of this. The great alchemist Fulcanelli and others have said that a great transmutation of the human species is going to takes place at some time near the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Kubrick picked the date 2001 - which is astonishingly close to other dates prescribed by many ancient alchemists - including Nostradamus. What are we to make of the strange date that Kubrick picked out for the final transformation of the human species?

Somehow, Kubrick knew.

Jay Weidner is a film maker, lecturer and writer. He is the co-author of A Monument to the End of Time: Alchemy, Fulcanelli and the Great Cross, with Vincent Bridges.

Sacredmysteries.com

goldenflower@cs.com

MainPage
<http://www.rense.com>

This Site Served by TheHostPros